

“The Scattered are Reunited!”

Have your parents ever told you to do something? Your obedience will bring blessings like harmony, trust, and the love of your parents. Disobey them and, depending on the degree of disobedience, you might face grounding, break their trust, or receive their punishment and even their wrath. God’s commands always include a blessing for obedience. Our LORD never commands us to do something that is detrimental or harmful. Obedience brings positive blessings; disobedience brings negative consequences.

In Genesis 9:1 we read that when Noah disembarked from the ark, God gave him and his descendents the command to **fill the earth**. This meant to spread out and populated the whole world. It is a command that God repeated to Noah a few verses later. Our text opens with the people migrating southeast from the Caucasus Mountains into the plain of Shinar, which today is in Iraq. It was here in ancient Babylon that the people decided to stop. They chose not to do as God commanded. They refused to obey God. God had given them a target to shoot for: to **fill the earth**. Not only did they miss the target, they chose not even to aim for the target. They elected to sin!

Why do people ignore God today? Why do people choose to disobey God and sin? Why do they choose not to learn, study, know and follow God? They fall to the lures of sinful, worldly pleasures. They reject God as God, and begin to worship themselves. Think they know more than God and that they can do it better than God. They see no need for God in their lives!

In our text we find them saying, **“Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the earth.”** Why would they refuse to obey God? Could it be a lack of faith in God? Perhaps they feared separation would bring dangers, maybe food shortages and famine. They did not believe God’s promises. We see in text the heart of the problem is idolatry. They wanted to **“make a name for themselves!”** Self worship!

How do people make a name for themselves today? Beware of the god of success! Understand that there is in itself, nothing wrong in being successful or great, wealthy or in a position of power and influence. The problem is we often use our quest for success as excuses to avoid God, shun away from His Word, and refuse to obey Him. Does success justify forsaking our marital

and parental responsibilities; lying, cheating, or stealing; not being a good neighbor or citizen? Don't let our desire for success destroy our faith in God and lead us into idolatry. Do you think success is greatest thing to have at all costs – even at the price of selling one's soul?

The people on the plain of Shinar began to build a massive tower that would reach the heavens. This enormous structure was constructed with bricks and tar. This area offered an endless supply of tar from numerous tar pits. But what happens when temperatures rise and tar begins to heat up? The bricks will slip and slide. Oh, what a gooey mess! See how sin corrupts our minds!

Sometimes our fears today can lead us to abandon God. Fears and anxiety come when we are out of Word. False values confuse us and led us astray. Lack of trust comes when we fail to know and believe God. Our struggles in life are real issues. Making ends meet, medical needs, illness of a loved one, the death of a spouse; or facing the unknown after graduating from high school or college can create fear in us when we don't know God's love.

Verse 5 contains a bit of divine humor in the form of irony. What were the disobedient idolaters trying to do? Build this enormous structure that would be a memorial to their greatness. Construct a tower that would reach the heavens! A big, awesome, colossal, gargantuan, mammoth structure! Yet from God's perspective this manmade tower was so small, tiny, microscopic, minuscule, and minute that God, from His throne in Heaven, could not clearly make out what it was that man was building. So, in an anthropomorphic sense, the LORD had to get down on His hands and knees, and squint to see what mankind was building! How often do we over estimate our greatness? Too often we are legends in our own minds!

God realized how men were misusing their common language. They used it as an opportunity to deny God, ignore God, and reject God. It opened the door for them to do things of great wickedness, have the audacity to reject their Creator, act with insolence, and do terrible evil deeds. As the punishment God did not send a plague or have poisonous snakes terrorize the people. He had another plan: He confused their languages. Their construction came to a halt! They no longer all spoke the same language. Their evil and corrupt communications were cut off. Everyone ran around trying to find someone he could understand, someone who could understand him, someone, anyone! And I wonder if God intentionally made it so that no husband and wife spoke the same language?

Do you remember the initial goal which the people ignored and defied? God commanded them to “**fill the earth!**” It would have been a lot simpler if the people had just obeyed God and spread out. In his discussion on the meaning of the 3rd Petition of the LORD’S Prayer, “**Thy will be done,**” Luther reminds us that “**the good and gracious will of God is done...**” either with our support or without it. There are times in our lives when it would be better for us and easier on us if we just trusted God’s will and obeyed His commands!

You might wonder, why was this text chosen as a reading for Pentecost Sunday? How does this Biblical event at Babel relate to you and me today? Is the Scripture showing us that God’s wishes will be done with us or without us? Is it warning us to obey God or face the consequences? Is it showing us that God considers idolatry to be a terrible sin? Or, does it show us the love of God for sinners and in doing so, urge us to turn from our sins and live a new life? Or, could the point be a combination of all the above? Because sin confuses people and languages separate people, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on this day began to bring people of many languages together in Christ. It is in a sense the tower of Babel in reverse!

In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit begun at Pentecost, God shows His undeserved love for sinners. He calls out to people of every language. He reassures them of His love, invites them to repent and receive His forgiveness. As the Holy Spirit works through the Gospel message of Jesus Christ people hear, respond, repent, receive forgiveness, and begin a new life. Look at the first Pentecost: the apostles filled with the Holy Spirit, told people from all parts of the Roman Empire the Good News that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of God, and that through faith in Him we have forgiveness for all our sins, renewed fellowship with God, and eternal life.

The Spirit continues to be poured out today. The message of Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection turns the hearts of people all over this Earth. And Jesus uses ordinary people like you and me to share that message with others. As the Spirit brings faith into our hearts, as we change for the better, as we realize the magnitude of God’s love for us, moved by the Spirit and motivated by God’s love, we in turn reach out to others with the Gospel’s message. The world is full of people who need the assurance of God’s love; people who struggle against temptation and the guilt for their sins; people who long for wisdom, meaning, and guidance in life; people who live in the fear of not making ends meet, the struggles of parenting, the challenges of caring for

aging parents, and fear facing death. You have the answer for what the world needs: It is Jesus! Don't keep Jesus a secret! Tell them and show them Jesus!

In the outpouring of the Spirit beginning at Pentecost we are given the power of the Holy Spirit to fulfill the command of Jesus to “**make disciples of all nations.**” Let us not be like the people on the Plain of Shinar who refused to obey God. Let us not become distracted by our drive for success and greatness. Let us not outright refuse to share the Gospel or find excuses not to support the mission of the Church. Rather let us be a part of God's Will being done! Let us be a part of the outpouring at Pentecost, let us be a part of the movement where **THE SCATTERED ARE REUNITED** in Jesus Christ our LORD! IJN, amen.